Kavari in Tirukkuṟaḷ and Sangam Texts: Dravidian word for Gauṛ bison and Tibetan yak

Dr. Nagamanickam Ganesan

Houston, Texas, USA

Abstract: In Tolkāppiyam, solitary male mammals of the forest are listed in sūtra, Tol. *marapiyal 37*. Solitaires, called "*oruttal*", are those of deer, tiger, blackbuck, Nilgai antelope and gaur-buffalo roaming the forest alone in their peak of adolescence. In addition, crocodiles are included. For the wild bison (*Gauṛ*) and domestic buffalo, Tolkāppiyam gives the name, "*kavari*". Ancient Indians named Tibetan yak also as "*kavari*" because of its resemblances with *Gauṛ* bison. Sangam texts such as Puṟanāṉūṟu and Patirṟuppattu mention *kavari*, the Tibetan yak as well as *aṉṉam*, which are migratory geese superbirds crossing the mighty Himalayas twice annually to reach South India and return. Tirukkuṟaḷ 969 states that just as yak will die in the frigid weather of the Himalayas if it loses the thick fur coat, people will not survive if they lose honor in Life. Indologists remark that *kavari* 'yak' and related *camari* 'yak's tail, used as fan' do not have a clear etymology yet. This paper proposes a Dravidian source for these words derivable from *kōṭu* and its transformed form, *kavaṭi* (DEDR 1325 and 2200). Both *kōṭu* and *kavaṭi* have meanings, such as the branch of a tree, forked junction and horns of the cattle. Tribal people speaking non-literary Dravidian languages still wear the horns of the wild buffalo, and in ancient Indus Valley, deities are depicted with these horns. Several parallel examples are given to illustrate the transformation from *-ṭ- into* –r- as occurred in *kavaṭi > kavari*. Finally, Gaurī, female Gauṛa bison in Rgveda and wife of Varuṇa, is shown to be from Dravidian *kavaṭi*.

1.0 Classical Tamil Texts and North Indian Fauna

Ancient Sangam Tamil texts are well aware of North Indian places, their fauna and flora. They often mention the rivers like the mighty Ganges and Yamuna, and they also describe the lofty Himalayas. Mt. Potiyil, the abode of Avalokeśvara in Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, is mentioned. The Himalayas and Mt. Potiyil are paired together in one breath to state the Northern and Southern ends of India. The bar-headed geese and graylag geese coming to South India across the Himalayas during annual migrations are portrayed vividly in Sangam texts as *aṉṉam*. The ancient poets often wondered about them staying in the South only during winter, and never building nests or breeding in the South, but they go back to the Himalayas to lay their eggs and raise their chicks only to return the following year. Taking the case of crocodiles, five important words (*ghaṛiyāl, kumbhīra, makara, nakar* and *viṭaṅkar*) for crocodiles in the Northern rivers, Indus and Ganges, are shown to be of Dravidian origin. The river, Yamunā's name seems to be derived from yāmai 'turtle' which is the symbol of that river, while Gharial crocodile, variously called as *viṭaṅkar/nakar/ghaṛiyāl* is the symbol of the Ganges river.

Prof. Asko Parpola has derived both *ghaṛiyāl* and *kumbhīra***,** the names of Gharial crocodile in Sanskrit and Hindi, from Dravidian [1]. In Eastern Indian languages such as Bengali, Bihari, and Nepali, the name, *nakar* (Cf. Tamil *nakkar*) is used for the gharial (pg. 417-418, [2]). Representations of *makara* in early Indian art matches with the form of crocodiles very closely. The marsh crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*) lives throughout the Indian subcontinent. The makara (> *magara* in Hindi) crocodile does 'high-walk' for short distances when it comes to the banks of rivers and lakes. This *makara/magara* marsh crocodile has four strong feet, and these are explicitly shown in the following Indus valley sign, and he connects the sign with Proto-Varuṇa: "In Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 2,19, the heavenly crocodile is called "the lord of all beings (*bhūtānām adhipatir*)", an appellation which further supports identification of this **kaṇ-kāṇi* 'overseer' with the Harappan predecessor of Varuṇa." Compare the Indus crocodile sign with the pictogrammatic Chinese reptile radical sign, 豸 and in Japanese, the "reptile radical" *ashinakimushi hen*. In English, the marsh crocodiles are called as "mugger" and dictionaries trace "mugger" ultimately to be of Dravidian origin. The most important words for 'crocodile' in South Asian languages have a Dravidian etymology. Austro-Asiatic,

on the other hand, does not seem to have any relation to the terms for 'crocodile' used more widely in South Asia [3].

An entire decad of songs is in Tēvāram by Sundarar on the naked mendicant, Śiva enticing women. The commentators explain that this chapter in Tēvāram refers to the episode vividly portrayed in Liṅgapurāṇa. V. M. Subramania Aiyar wrote: “This decade was composed as the words of those ladies who fell in love with the fascinating beauty of Civaṉ when he went begging and were afraid of coming into contact with his form; this idea is mentioned by Cuntarar himself in the last verse.” It is important to note that in each of the verses, Śiva is called Viṭaṅkar. Obviously, the Tamil term viṭaṅkar (cf. iṭaṅkar) cannot be split as vi+ṭaṅka 'one made without the use of the chisel', which is just a folk etymology to assign a pure Tamil word’s origin to Sanskrit. Like nīra ‘water’, nīla ‘blue color’ in all Indian languages from Dravidian, we have alternation of –l-/-r- in vār- “to pour, to flow down, a long belt” etc., as vāl/vālam ‘tail of birds, animals’. From the same root, with the loss of word-initial v-, āli- (< vāli-) is hailstones, rain drops. Some more examples of v- loss: indu/vindu ‘drop, seed’, iṭi/viṭuku ‘thunder’, āli/vāli ‘rain drops’, aḷai/vaḷai ‘hole’, iḻutu/viḻutu ‘fat, ghee’. Similarly, viṭaṅkar ‘gharial’ loses the v- and is attested as iṭaṅkar ‘gharial’ in Sangam texts. Note that iṭi, āli-, aḷai, iṭaṅkar are in Sangam but their root words viṭi (= viṭuku, Pallava royal title), vāli-, vaḷai, viṭaṅkar respectively are attested in post-Sangam period. The word, indu (< vindu) is attested even in Rgveda itself. Without considering these root words beginning with v-, it is impossible to explain the origin of these words in Sangam which is a rather small corpus. In old Tamil texts, *viṭai* refers to the virile male of animals - bovids, caprids, antelopes, elephants. It is a verbal noun from *viṭai-* 'to enlarge, to thicken, to stiffen up, to stand with pride’ (also *viṟai-/viṭai-*, cf. DEDR 5439) [4].

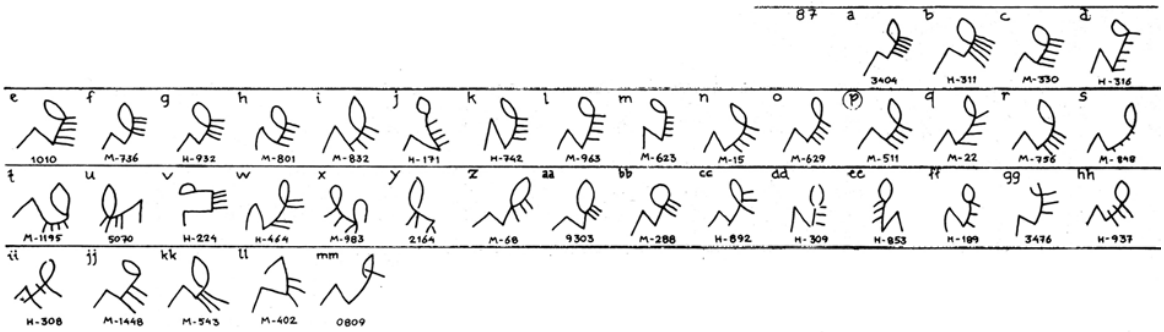

Figure 1. Indus sign number 87 (Crocodile – identification by Parpola, [1])

In classical Tamil texts such as Puṟanāṉūṟu, Patiṟṟuppattu, Tolkāppiyam grammar and Tirukkuṟaḷ, the word, kavari occurs with the meaning of buffalo, Indian bison or Tibetan yak. Some examples can be given:

(1) kavir tatai cilampil tuñcum kavari
parantu ilaṅku aruviyoṭu narantam kaṉavum
āriyar tuvaṉṟiya pēricai imayam
teṉṉaṅ kumariyoṭu āyiṭai
maṉmīk kūṟunar maṟam tapak kaṭantē (Patiṟṟuppattu 11).

Yak sleeping on Himalayan slopes full of coral flower trees, dream of and chew the *narantam* grass they ate, and of wide waterfalls from which they drank, in the well renowned Himalayas where Aryans live. In the land between that mountain and southern Kumari, you have ruined the strength of arrogant kin.

(2) narantai naṟum pul mēynta kavari
kuvaḷai paim cuṉai paruki ayala (Puṟanāṉūṟu 132:4-5)

In the North, on the sky-high Himalayas, a yak enjoys eating oranges and grazes on *narantam* grass, drinks from a nearby pool.

(3) mayir nīppiṉ vāḻāk kavari māvaṉṉār

uyir nīppar māṉam variṉ (Tirukkuṟaḷ 969)

Just like the Tibetan yak perishing in the frigid weather of the Himalayas if it loses the thick fur coat, people will not survive if they lose honor in Life. It is essential to maintain Honor at all costs.

Often, the classical texts use the word, *kavari* or *veṇ-kavari* (white kavari), the fur from Yak buffalo, as the fan bristles waved in front of chieftains and deities, and used as decoration on the head of horses and above the ears of elephants.

(1) vēntu vīcu kavariyiṉ pū putal aṇiya (Narriṇai 241:6)

(2) muracu uṭaic celvar puraviccūṭṭu

mūṭṭuṟu kavari tūkki (Akanāṉūṟu 156:1-2)

(3) kavari mucci kār viri kūntal (Patirruppattu 43:1)

The white *kavari/cavari* from yak-cow hybrids of Nepal are highly valued in Indian temples. These hybrids themselves are called "*cauri*" in Nepal, and live in the transition zone between Tibetan yaks and Indian cattle. In Tamil, *cavari/cauri/camari/cāmarai* (< kavaṭi/kōṭu) is a braid, fillet of hair, plaited hair, bushy tail of the Tibetan yak used as false hair or set in decorated handle and used as a fly-flap or fan before an idol or a great personage. Cauri hybrids are comparable to gaur-cow hybrids seen in the sculptures of Indus Valley Civilization, and Sangam texts call these hybrids or gaur themselves as *āmā* 'cow-like animal'.

Figure 2. Cauri, yak-cow hybrid in Nepal

Tolkāppiyam grammar uses the mammal name, *kavari*, with interesting semantics. "*pulvāy puli uḻai maraiyē kavari colliya karāmoṭu oruttal oṉṟum*" (Tol. Poruḷ. Marapiyal). In this sūtra, the male solitary animals of spotted deer, tiger, blackbuck, Nilgai antelope, gaur-buffalo and crocodile have a name: *oruttal*. Later sutras mention another name for their males as *ēṟu*, and the females are called *piṇai*.

2.0 Significance of Kōṭu 'horn' of bison and buffalo in ancient India

The ancient Dravidian people thought of the buffalo, especially in the wild, and its cultural equivalent, the Indian gaur bison as ferocious and worthy of adulation. The Indus seals of Gharial crocodile as Master of Animals display two bisons interlocking their horns, thus providing an artificial crown of horns to the crocodile.

Figure 3. Crocodile god with Bisons providing horns (Mohenjadaro seal)

In another seal from Mohenjadaro, a little girl, wearing a ponytail and a skirt, is being thrown outwards by a powerful buffalo (R. Mackay, 1938) [5]. The same girl seems to be shown five times on a single seal from Banawali, with the intent to capture the ferociousness of battle and different stages in the war. Indus seals often depict divinities with buffalo horns. In historical times, a bison head is seated on the throne to denote Buddha, and in coins, it is shown as a royal symbol. Because of the high importance assigned to the horns of the wild buffalo and bisons in Dravidian cultures, these bovids get their name as *kavari* derivable directly from *kōṭu* 'horn'. By similarity with the shape, size and color, Himalayan yaks are named as kavari in Tamil. It is noteworthy that the prominent dorsal shape of both Indian gaur bison and Himalayan yak are quite comparable.

Figure 4. Yak grazing (dorsal comparable with Gaur)

3.0 *Gauṛa* and *Kavari* – Related names of Indian bison and buffalo

Dravidian Etymological Dictionary entries, DEDR 1325 and 2200, show the relationship between words, *kōṭu* and *kavaṭu* with almost identical semantic clustering. The meanings are horn, hump, fork like branches of a tree or road junction, and bivalve shell-fish.

DEDR 2200 Ta. kōṭu (in cpds. kōṭṭu-) horn, tusk, branch of tree, cluster, bunch, coil of hair, line, diagram, bank of stream or pool; kuvaṭu branch of a tree; kōṭṭāṉ, kōṭṭuvāṉ rock horned-owl (cf. 1657 Ta. kuṭiñai). Ko. koˑṛ (obl. koˑṭ-) horns (one horn is kob), half of hair on each side of parting, side in game, log, section of bamboo used as fuel, line marked out. To. horn, branch, path across stream in thicket. Ka. kōḍu horn, tusk, branch of a tree; kōṟ horn. Tu. kōḍů, kōḍu horn. Te. kōḍu rivulet, branch of a river. Pa. kōḍ (pl. kōḍul) horn. Ga. (Oll.) kōr (pl. kōrgul) id. Go. (Tr.) kōr (obl. kōt-, pl. kōhk) horn of cattle or wild animals, branch of a tree; (W. Ph. A. Ch.) kōr (pl. kōhk), (S.) kōr (pl. kōhku), (Ma.) kōṟu (pl. kōḫku) horn; (M.) kohk branch (Voc. 980); (LuS.) kogoo a horn. Kui kōju (pl. kōska) horn, antler. Cf. 2049 Ta. koṭi. DED (N) 1824

DEDR 1325 Ta. kavar (-v-, -nt-) to separate into various channels, deviate, depart from instructions; churn (or with 1340); (-pp-, -tt-) to branch off (as roads), fork, bifurcate; n. bifurcated branch (as of tree or river),

prong; kavarppu forking, bifurcation; kavarpu differing; kavaṭu branch of tree, forked branch, separation, division; kavaṭṭi, kavaṭṭai fork of a branch, branching root; kavuṭṭi space between the thighs; kavalai forking of branches, place where several ways meet; kavai (-pp-, -tt-) to fork (as a branch); n. division, cleavage (as of hoof, a crab's claws), branch of a tree, forked stick, crossroads; kavam, kavvam churning stick; kavvu fork of a branch or horn; kappu forked branch, branch, bough, cleavage, cleft; kappi (-pp-, -tt-) to fork as a branch. Ma. kava forked branch, space between the legs; kavekka to stand astride; kavaṭi pitch-fork; kavaṭṭa the forked branch of a tree; kavaram, kavar bifurcated branch or shoot, prong of a pitch-fork; kavarikkuka to shoot forth as a forked branch; kavala place where two roads meet; kappu bifurcated branch. Ko. kav forked stick, fork of branch; kavc goˑl forked stick used as potholder; kavṛ forked branch. To. kafyforked stick, double peak of a hill, hair of a god or of priest of tiˑ-dairy. Ka. kaval to become bifurcated or forked, branch off; n. bifurcation, forked or lateral branch, forked stick, divided state, couple, pair; kavate forked state; kavaḍu, kave = kaval n. Tu. kaba space between the fingers; kabarů forked or lateral branch, forked stick; forked; kabe forked stick; cloven, forked; (B-K.) kappu fork of a wooden post. Te. kava pair, couple; kavalu twins; kavvamu churning stick. Go. (S.) kava churning stick (Voc. 596). Malt. kapli a pair of branches, horns or antlers. DED(S, N) 1113.

The leap-frogging game of kavaṭi, where the raider holds his breath while chanting "kavaṭi, kavaṭi". The anti-raiders try to form "forks" around him and try to catch and overpower him. This is a national sport in many Indian states, including Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

In Sangam poetry, there is a wild grass and grain called kavaṭi which does not yield good grains to eat. In Sangam poems, and in later Imperial kings' times, when enemies are vanquished, donkeys were tied in ploughs and the kavaṭi (Eleusine indica) and horsegram were sowed for planting. The intent is that the enemy lands should go waste. Kavaṭi grains look like forks coming together at a point, and hence its name. Kavaṭi is called *veḷḷai varaku* which is not productive as a food grain, but *kēḻ varaku* (= rāgi, E. coracana) is an important food millet. Eleusine indica is closely related to Eleusine coracana (finger millet or African finger millet), and the diploid E. indica is likely an ancestor of the allotetraploid E. coracana.

There are many examples in Dravidian where -ṭ- gets transformed into –r-. They include (i) nāḷam/nāṭi ‘vein, reed’ > nār/narampu, (ii) kōṭīra ‘crown’ > kurīra , a Vedic word from Dravidian according to F.B.J. Kuiper (iii) galgala/kalkala ‘wheel’ (Sumeria) > kakkaḷa/kakaṭa > cakaṭa/śakaṭa ‘wheel’, and by extension means an ox-cart also. In addition, *kakkaṭa gives birth to cakkara ‘wheel’ in Dravidian (= cakra, in Sanskrit). The phonemic Tamil script requires doubling –kk- to get the unvoiced pronunciation whereas –k- is sufficient for it in Hindi-like phonetic scripts. Similarly, we see kavaṭi > kavari for bison, buffalo and yak in Tamil and other Indic languages.

It is becoming increasingly clear that Indus civilization was not created by Munda community, and it did not have Munda language speakers, as Munda linguistic expansion into Eastern Indian states like Meghalaya or Orissa took place only 3500 years ago from South East Asia [6]. Many words exhibiting k-/ ś- relationship word-initially in Sanskrit can be shown to be from Dravidian and do not exhibit ancient Munda substratum in Bronze Age Indus civilization. Taking the case of kombu/kambu > śambu which even today means shell-fish species like clams, oysters, bivalves, mussels that can be split into two just like horns of cattle, forking branches. By comparison with the shape and black color of clams and mussels, the jambu (< sambu) fruit is so named. A famous epithet of Śiva is “kapardin” having braids split into half which directly follows from kavaṭi/kavari [7]. As in the change of śambu/sambu > jambu (Cf. jambu-dvīpa, [8]), the voicing of kavaṭi/kavari > gavaṛi/gauri “Indian bison” has happened in Rgveda. It is to be noted that the Indo-Iranian term, gaura-khar as sveta-gardhabha “white onager or wild asses” is different from gavaṛi/gauri < kavaṭi/kavari of Dravidian. Neither the buffalo nor the bison is white or pale in color. In fact, in Tamil bhakti period literature, Gauri is said to be black in color which is the natural color of buffalo and bison. In sum,

gauri/kavari from *kōṭu* highlights the Dravidian cultural significance attached to the powerful bovid mammals and has a long history in the twin classical languages of India, i.e., Tamil and Sanskrit.

4.0 References:

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